The Preoperative Electrocardiogram: Meaningless Routine or Essential Tool?

To the Editor,

The clinical assessment prior to any surgical intervention is generally carried out by an anaesthesiologist, however, in many cases the cardiologist is also required given that the cardiovascular risk has the greatest clinical and prognosis significance in the majority of interventions. The electrocardiogram (ECG) is a firmly established element of the preoperative cardiological assessment.

Official guidelines on clinical practice\(^1\) take it for granted that the ECG forms part of the basic preoperative assessment, in addition to risk stratification using the normal scales.\(^2\) They even state that an abnormal ECG determines the need for a cardiological consultation. The ECG is a firmly established element of the preoperative cardiological assessment.

Official guidelines on clinical practice\(^1\) take it for granted that the ECG forms part of the basic preoperative assessment, in addition to risk stratification using the normal scales.\(^2\) They even state that an abnormal ECG determines the need for a cardiological consultation. The ECG is a firmly established element of the preoperative cardiological assessment.

The process outlined in Figure 1 has therefore been put forward for assessing patients undergoing non-cardiac interventions.\(^4\) Without entering in the debate regarding which

---

Figure 1. Procedure put forward for preoperative assessment. *The corresponding criteria are outlined in the text.
professional should perform the initial assessment of the patient before an non-cardiac surgical intervention, the aforementioned process indicates an ECG for patients undergoing emergency interventions, those who present a high risk due to combined pathology (heart failure, ischaemic heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, diabetes, chronic renal failure, and uncontrolled arterial hypertension) and for those requiring high or medium risk interventions. Low risk interventions are those performed under local or local and regional anaesthesia (endoscopy, dental procedures, breast surgery, endocrinology and gynaecological and plastic, and reconstructive surgery). Finally, a cardiological assessment is indicated if the ECG is abnormal: history and physical examination, echocardiogram, and ischaemia detection test if required (usually an exercise ECG or echocardiographic stress test).

Eduardo Alegria Ezquerra,
Eduardo Alegria Barrero,
and Ana Alegria Barrero

Departamento de Cardiología y Cirugía Cardiovascular,
Clínica Universitaria de Navarra, Facultad de Medicina,
Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, Navarra, Spain

REFERENCES